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## SOME RABBINIC IDEAS ON PRAYER\*.

IF it be true that the ordinary Hebrew verb for praying (*hithpallel*) comes from a root meaning "to rend," then it may follow that with the primitive Hebrews prayer implied "cuttings of the flesh," by which men sought to influence the Deity<sup>1</sup>. Thus the origin of the most profoundly spiritual conception which the world owes to Hebraism must, on this theory, be sought in Sympathetic Magic, with which Dr. Frazer has so familiarized us<sup>2</sup>. Some religious students are rather depressed by such theories; they seem to think that religion is being degraded by the connexions suggested between their own most cherished ideas and the crude, unlovely rites of savages. But surely this feeling of repugnance is unjustifiable. One has reason for pride, not shame, that human nature has shown itself capable of transforming, under the impulse of the divine spirit, the ugly into the beautiful, magic into religion. From this point of view there is nothing disturbing in the theory that Hebraic prayer originated in savage rites. If, again, we stride from the beginning to the end, from the primitive Hebraic origin to the developed doctrine of Pharisaism, we are told by Professor Schürer that "even prayer itself, that centre of religious life, was bound in the fetters of a rigid mechanism." Starting as magic, Hebraic prayer thus culminated in routine. Is this credible? Between the two extremes lie the prophetic religion, the Psalter, the pre-Christian liturgy of the Synagogue. That all this faded away into an "external function" is one of the most

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<sup>1</sup> See notes on pp. 291-3.

extraordinary of all the delusions to which German theologians have fallen victims<sup>3</sup>.

But the purpose of this paper is not controversial, unless it be controversial to attempt to present a little more of the truth over against less of the truth. At all events, no negative criticism will be indulged in; rather it will be sought to present positively the developed conception of prayer as it is to be found in the Rabbinic literature. That conception is, on the whole, the conception still predominant in Judaism; and it has seemed more useful to explain this developed conception than to trace the steps by which it was evolved. To the historian path is as important as goal; not so, however, to those who would fain derive from all religious systems the best that they have to offer.

It is, one must admit, not easy to speak of a Rabbinic conception of prayer at all. Rabbinic theology is a syncretism, not a system. To the earliest Pharisees the Bible as a whole, to the later Rabbis the Bible and the traditional literature as a whole, were the sources of inspiration. Hence they adopted and adapted ideas of many ages and many types of mind, and in consequence you may find in Rabbinic Judaism traces of primitive thought side by side with the most developed thought. Especially is this true of prayer. A conspectus of Rabbinic passages on prayer would cover the whole range of evolution, from the spells of a rain-producing magician to the soul-communion of an inspired mystic. A slip in uttering the formulae of prayer was an evil sign<sup>4</sup>. The Rabbis, again, believed on the one hand in the efficacy of the prolonged prayers of the righteous in general, and on the other hand they, like a certain school of modern Evangelicals, sometimes confided in the possession by gifted individuals of a special faculty for influencing the powers above. Such individuals were mighty men of prayer, able to force their will on a reluctant providence; they would argue, importune, persuade. It has always remained an element in the Jewish theory of prayer that man can affect God; what man does, what he thinks,

what he prays, influence the divine action. It is not merely that God cares for a man, is concerned with and for man. God's purpose is affected, his intention changed by prayer. These phases of belief are, however, never altogether absent from prayer, even in its most spiritualized varieties. They are noticeable in the Psalms, and, when one remembers the influence of the Psalter, one need not wonder to find these phases of belief in the extant liturgies of all creeds. Perhaps we may put it that in the Pharisaic theology there was a fuller belief in special providences than is now thought tenable; but after reading some of the papers in a recent Christian volume entitled "In Answer to Prayer <sup>5</sup>" one must hesitate before making this assertion to the detriment of Pharisaism. The Rabbis somewhat mitigated the crudity of the belief in special providences by holding that all miracles were pre-ordained, and were inherent in the act of creation. But the order of nature is a modern theory: you will look for it in vain whether in Rabbinic or early Christian books. Now so soon as you believe in special providences, you are liable to seek them by special petitions, and prayer may degenerate into importunity. Onias the circle-drawer would not leave his circumscribed standing-place until the rain fell, and he told people in advance to place under cover all perishable things, so sure was he that God must send the rain for which he prayed <sup>6</sup>. Hanina ben Dosa could always tell from his fluency or hesitancy when he prayed for sick men whether the patients would live or die. And though such cited cases are rare in the Talmud, and are perhaps Essenic rather than Pharisaic, still it was generally believed that specific prayer for a specific end might hit the mark.

It *might* hit the mark, but it was not certain to do so. Therein lies the whole saving difference. If Rabbinism is firm in its assertion that prayer *may* be answered, it is firmer still in its denial that prayer *must* be answered. The presumptuous anticipations of Onias the circle-drawer were rebuked by some Rabbis. Prayer was efficacious,

but its whole efficacy was lost if reliance was placed upon its efficacy. As the Prayer Book version of Psalm xxvii. 16 runs: "O tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong and he shall comfort thine heart: and put thy trust in him." But the wicked man is in a hurry. Like Tom Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss*, his faith cannot survive the failure of divine answer to a petition that he may know his Latin verbs in school next morning. The recovered Hebrew original of Sirach gives us the fine text: "Be not impatient in prayer<sup>7</sup>." The Rabbis put it that the wicked denies God if he happen to pray in vain; the righteous man receives affliction as the mead of virtue yet never questions the justice of God. Solomon's Prayer on dedicating the Temple is thus summarized in the Midrash: When, O Lord, a Hebrew prays to thee, grant what seems *good to thee*; when a heathen prays, grant what seems *good to him*<sup>8</sup>. The meaning of this fine Rabbinic saying is: the heathen entirely rests his belief in God on an immediate, specific answer to his prayers, and Solomon entreats God to give the heathen such specific answer in order to retain his allegiance. The true believer is, on the contrary, free from such reliance on the objective validity of his supplication; to him *that* is good which God pleases to ordain.

At this place a word must be interposed on a category of what the Rabbis call Vain or Fruitless prayer (*tephillath shav*). "Though a sharpened sword is held at a man's throat, he shall not withhold himself from mercy<sup>9</sup>," that is: Prayer and penitence may avail even at the eleventh hour. But not at the twelfth. I do not assert that the Rabbis disbelieved in the possibility of salvation after death. But they held that it was in this life futile to pray *ex post facto*. Thus: "He who supplicates God concerning what has already come to pass utters a vain prayer<sup>10</sup>." If you are going to look at an honours list, you waste your time in praying that your name may be found there or found in a particular position. As the Rabbis otherwise put it, You must not *rely* on miracles. Thus certain prayers are

excluded by the Rabbis from the very possibility of answer. To this category belong also such prayers as one which Raba overheard and blamed. He once heard a man praying that he might win the love of a certain maiden. Raba bade him cease his prayer, urging: "If she be destined for thee, nothing can part you; if thou art not destined to get her, thou deniest providence in praying for her<sup>11</sup>." For marriages are made in Heaven, and are beyond praying for.

Even more to the point is the Rabbinic denunciation of what they term *Iyyun Tephillah*. The word *Iyyun* means thought, calculation. Sometimes it is used with regard to prayer in a good sense, to connote careful devotion as opposed to mechanical utterance of prescribed formulae. But there is another word for that, viz. *kavvanah*, which may be rendered devotion, than which no more necessary quality can be conceived of in the Rabbinic theory of prayer. But *Iyyun Tephillah* is very often used in a bad sense. Calculation in prayer is the expectation of an answer to prayer as a due claim, and the Rabbis protest with much vehemence against such *expectation* of a divine response to prayer of any kind whatsoever. "He who prays long and relies on an answer ends in disappointment." Again: "To three sins man is daily liable—thoughts of evil, reliance on prayer, and slander<sup>12</sup>." Thus the expectation of an answer to prayer is an insidious intruder, difficult to avoid, and branded as sin. Perhaps the point can be best illustrated from another side. Not only do the righteous expect no answer to prayer, but they are reluctant to supplicate God for personal benefits. "The Holy One," we are told, "yearns for the prayers of the righteous." God's throne was not established until his children sang songs to him; for there can be no king without subjects. And as God wishes for man's praise, so he longs for man's petitions. But the righteous cannot easily be brought to make petitions. This is the Talmudic explanation of the barrenness of the Patriarchs' wives; God withheld children

to compel the reluctant saints to proffer petitions for them. And so also, from a somewhat different point of view, with the whole people of Israel. Why did God bring Israel into the extremity of danger at the Red Sea before effecting a deliverance? Because God longed to hear Israel's prayer. Said R. Joshua b. Levi: To what is the matter like? It is like a king who was once travelling on the way, and a daughter of kings cried to him, "I pray thee, deliver me out of the hand of these robbers." The king obeyed and rescued her. After a while he wished to make her his wife; he longed to hear her sweet accents again, but she was silent. What did the king do? He hired the same robbers again to set upon the princess, to cause her to cry out, that he might hear her voice once more. So soon as the robbers came upon her, she began to cry to the king. And he, hastening to her side, said, "This is what I yearned for, to hear thy voice."—Thus was it with Israel. When they were in Egypt, enslaved, they began to cry out, and hang their eyes on God, as it is written: And it came to pass . . . that the children of Israel sighed because of their bondage . . . and they cried. Then the Scripture immediately follows: And God looked upon the children of Israel. He began to take them forth from Egypt, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. And God wished to hear their voice a second time, but they were unwilling. What did God do? He incited Pharaoh to pursue them, as it is said: And he drew Pharaoh near. Immediately the children of Israel cried unto the Lord. In that hour God said: For this I have been seeking, to hear your voice, as it is written in the Song of Songs [which Rabbinic exegesis interpreted as an allegory of the Love of God and Israel] "My dove in the clefts of the rock, let me hear thy voice; thy voice, the same voice which I first heard in Egypt<sup>13</sup>."

There is a hint here of another note, but we can hear it elsewhere more unmistakably. "Honour the physician before thou hast need of him," says Ecclesiasticus. This

passage is used in the Talmud to criticize the common practice of praying only under the pressure of necessity. "The Holy One said: Just as it is my office to cause the rain and the dew to fall, and make the plants to grow to sustain man, so art thou bounden to pray before me, and to praise me in accordance with my works; thou shalt not say, I am in prosperity, wherefore shall I pray; but when misfortune befalls me then will I come and supplicate. Before misfortune comes, anticipate and pray<sup>14</sup>." It will be seen that such passages as this carry us far beyond the conception of prayer as petition. It is an attitude of mind, a constant element of the religious life, independent of the exigencies of specific needs or desires. And that, one may say, on a review of the whole evidence, is the predominant thought in the Rabbinic theory of prayer.

From one side this is illustrated by the importance attached to public worship. This importance partly arose from the regularity of that worship. It was not a casual impulse, but a recurrent feature of the daily round. But there lay much more than this in the Rabbinic glorification of public prayer. The prayer of a community may be selfish as against the welfare of other communities, but the selfishness is less demoralizing than when an individual prays for what may entail injury to another individual. Even selfishness of the first kind, that is, communal selfishness in prayer, is castigated in some famous Rabbinic passages. "The Angels," it is said, "wished to sing praises to God while the Egyptians were drowning in the sea, and God rebuked them, saying, Shall I listen to your hymns when my children are perishing before my eyes?"<sup>15</sup> This was no mere pious expression, for the Passover liturgy of the synagogue has been permanently affected by this Rabbinic idea. On the Jewish festivals the noble series of Psalms of Praise (Hallel)—Psalms cxiii to cxviii—are a regular feature of the synagogue service. But on the seventh day of Passover—the traditional anniversary of the drowning of the Egyptians in the Red Sea—these psalms



are curtailed, on the basis of the Talmudic utterance just cited. Thus did the Pharisees, and the religion derived from them, honour the text: "When thy enemy falls do not rejoice."

There are, no doubt, imprecatory passages in the Psalter, and some (by no means all) of these have found their way into the service of synagogue and church. But, except in times of bitter persecution (as in the Puritan struggle against tyranny in England, or during the Crusades), these imprecatory petitions have not been interpreted personally. Still, Jew and Christian could do without them. There is enough in the Psalter without these.

An interesting incident bearing on the same point is related by Josephus. Aretas, the Nabatean king, was besieging Jerusalem about 67 B.C. with a combined force of Arabians and Jews. "Now there was a man whose name was Onias, a righteous man, and beloved of God, who, in a certain drought, had prayed to God to put an end to the intense heat, and whose prayer God had heard and had sent rain. This man had hid himself, because he saw that this civil war would last a long while. However, they brought him to the Jewish camp, and desired that as by his prayers he had once put an end to the drought, so he would in like manner utter imprecations on Aristobulus and those of his faction. And when, on his refusing and making excuses, he was still compelled to speak by the multitude, he stood up in the midst of them, and said: 'O God, King of the whole world, since those that stand now with me are thy people, and those that are besieged are also thy priests, I beseech thee that thou wilt hearken neither to the prayers of those against these, nor bring to effect what these pray against those.'" Such impartiality was not pleasing to the lower minds and violent partisans who claimed God as exclusively on their side, as is the wont of the mean and the partisan in all ages. When the "wicked among the Jews who stood around him" found that he, whom they had brought to curse, refused the amiable

rôle assigned to him, they speedily made an end of Onias<sup>16</sup>. But the underlying idea of Onias's prayer meets us elsewhere. A human judge, we are reminded, hears only one side at a time; God hears the whole world at once. The Shechinah, or divine presence, rests on ten when praying together—ten forming a quorum for public worship. It is possible that some irresistible power was attributed to the prayers of a congregation, and one catches suspicious echoes in Rabbinic literature of this unworthy belief, but it is nowhere explicitly enunciated. The idea rather seems that the individual petition counts less in such prayers, and the individual's own peculiar claims are merged in and reinforced by the mass. "All are equal when they pray before God, women and slaves, sage and simpleton, poor and rich." "When one prays with the congregation it is like a number of rich men who are making a crown for the king, and a poor man comes and inserts his mite. Shall the king think less of the crown because of this poor man's contribution? So when a wicked man joins in prayer with the righteous, shall God reject this joint prayer because of him?" Congregational prayer thus levels up, and makes irrelevant any distinction between righteous and unrighteous. Or take this saying, "When various congregations pray, the angel appointed over prayer gathers their supplications together and sets them as a garland on the brow of the Most High<sup>17</sup>." That, at all events, part of the Rabbinic predilection for public prayer was due to this greater unselfishness, is seen by the frequency with which men are urged to pray for one another. "A prayer uttered in behalf of another is answered first;" "He who loses a chance of praying for another is termed sinner;" "Elimelech and his sons were punished for their failure to pray for their generation<sup>18</sup>." They left Judea, it will be remembered, for Moab, and thus subtracted their prayers from those that ascended on behalf of the famine-stricken congregation. Perhaps this point best comes out in a Rabbinic prayer which at first sight may seem queer

enough. "Let not the prayer of wayfarers find entrance, O Lord, before thee <sup>19</sup>." For wayfarers would selfishly ask for fine weather when the general good of the land needed rain. Selfishness can no further go, nor can one conceive a subtler rebuke of selfishness than this.

Now, all the Pharisaic ritual laws which so trouble the spirit of German theologians refer to this public prayer. That this ritualism had its serious dangers is clear enough. The inevitable result of a fixed liturgy is rigidity. The fixation of times and seasons and formulae for prayer does tend to reduce the prayer to a mere habit. But what can be done at any time and in any manner is apt to be done at no time and in no manner. The Rabbis thus attached great importance to habits. "Fix a period for thy study of Scripture<sup>20</sup>" is a well-known Rabbinic maxim. The study of Scripture was, of course, an act of worship, it was higher than prayer. Raba declaimed against men who "put aside everlasting life [the Scriptures] and concern themselves with temporal life" [prayers for maintenance]. To know the will of God was more important than to seek to turn God's will in man's favour. Therefore, "Fix a period for thy study of Scripture." Dangerous fixity of a good custom, we exclaim. But is it not curious how inclined we are to detect this danger only in our more ideal habits? We read our morning newspapers as a matter of habit, yet we do not fear to become thereby only mechanically interested in the news of the world. But in the case of prayer the difficulty is supremely urgent. If prayer is to mean anything it must retain its spontaneity. And therefore the Rabbis did their utmost to counteract the inherent weakness of a settled liturgy. Hebrew was the preferable but not the necessary language of prayer; men might pray in any tongue. And though the study of the Law was to be a fixed thing, prayer was not to be a fixed thing. The Rabbis formulated this in a general principle: "Make not thy prayer a fixed thing but a supplication for mercy <sup>21</sup>." Fix the study of

God's word by which his will was made manifest, but do not make a fixed thing of prayer, for prayer is at once the human attempt to realize God's will and the human confession of inability to realize that will,—prayer is at highest a cry for mercy. What is the objectionable fixed thing in prayer? One Rabbi answers: "If a man's prayer is a burden;" another answers: "If the man does not pray as one seeking mercy"; a third answers: "If the man fails to introduce personal variations into the fixed forms." Ostentation was particularly discouraged. Again and again worshippers are cautioned not to pray too loudly. "He who shouts in prayer belongs to those who are of little faith<sup>22</sup>." A devotional heart, a humble attitude, are prescribed. The Pharisee, boasting in his prayer that he is not as other men, is not typical, for Pharisaism conceives all men equally destitute of saving virtue. Confession of sin, not profession of superior sinlessness, was the Pharisaic accompaniment of prayer. Eyes to earth, heart to heaven—is the Rabbi's suggestion for a prayerful posture.

These prescriptions could not completely succeed. But at this early period one must remember that public worship was of short duration. The length to which Jewish services have now grown was a slow evolution, and until the first decades of the fourteenth century the actual ritual of public worship was to a large extent in a very fluid condition. In the time of Jesus, you will recall the freedom with which any one could read and expound the Scriptures in the synagogue of Galilee. It is even possible that Jesus was able to select his own reading from Isaiah. And as to prayers, the same comparative freedom existed. When we talk, then, of a fixed liturgy in the time of Jesus, we must not think of anything like the current synagogue liturgies or the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Nothing is more remarkable than the extraordinary number of original individual prayers in the Talmud, and the faculty and process of ready improvisation for public as well as private worship has continued

with copious flow to our own times in the synagogue, though the stream of such inspiration was more generous in the spacious times which preceded the age of printing. The latter invention did more than Pharisaism to give rigidity to Judaism. It is not possible to give by quotations any true impression of the vast mass of new prayers which entered the publicity of the synagogue liturgy or the privacy of the Jewish home during the first fourteen centuries of the Christian era.

Then again, the Rabbis, though they sometimes emphasize the value of lengthy prayer, often declaim against it. The subject was not always approached from the same point of view, and it was admitted that there is a time to prolong and a time to shorten prayer. The Emperor Antoninus asked R. Judah the Prince: "May one pray at all times?" "No!" said the Rabbi, "it is treating God with levity." The Emperor was not convinced. So the Rabbi got up early next morning, went to the Emperor, and greeted him with the salutation, "My Lord!" An hour later he returned, and exclaimed, "O Imperator!" After another hour the Rabbi accosted him for the third time, with "Peace be to thee, O King!" Antoninus could no longer endure it. He angrily retorted on the Rabbi: "You are making mock of my royalty." "So!" said the Rabbi, "Thou, a king of flesh and blood, find these repeated greetings disrespectful; shall then man trouble the King of Kings at all times?<sup>23</sup>" On this Rabbinic parable Miss Martha Wolfenstein—gone from us all too soon—based a pathetic little story. "Genendel the Pious" was an old Ghetto Jewess who was noted for the regularity with which, during her days of poverty, she attended synagogue. Then her son, who had emigrated to America, sends her a monthly allowance, and Genendel leaves off going to synagogue. This is the cause of much scandal, and the Rabbi taunts her with her ingratitude to God. He quotes the text: "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked . . . then forsook the God who made him," and adds:

"Now that the Lord has provided for thee, thou no longer hast need of him—what?" But Genendel, pious soul, puts another face on the matter. This is her explanation:—

It is because I fear the Lord that I do not go to Schul [synagogue]. Many a day I feel that I would like to go—even though I no longer have need of it—for it has become a strong habit with me, this Schul-going. But I do not go. I bethink me of a story which my father—peace be to him—used to tell about their Count in Poland, where he lived. This Count was a very charitable man. Every day, when he came out of his house to go to the hunt, his doorstep would be full of beggars, and to all he gave. There was one beggar—his name was Mattis—who was there every day. No sooner did the Count come out of his door than there was Mattis crying, "O, your Grace, I *am* so poor and wretched." And the Count would give him bread or wood or money, as was his need. But in a day or two he would be there again, crying, "O, your Grace, I *am* so poor and wretched." Well, one day when there were not so many beggars the Count looked at Mattis, and his heart ached for the beggar. "It is sad," he said, "that an old, feeble man should have to beg here in the cold," and he gave orders to his servants that Mattis be given a gulden every week so long as he lived, that he need no longer beg. And Mattis was happy. He bought bread and herring, and a new coat—in short, he was a made man. But Mattis had gotten so used to standing every day on the Count's doorstep that he didn't know what else to do, and a few days thereafter, when the Count came out of his house to go to the hunt as usual, there was Mattis standing again on his doorstep. "For heaven's sake, Mattis," the Count cried, "what dost want now? Have I not provided for thee?" Then Mattis began to cry, "Yes, your Grace, I thank your Grace, but O, your Grace, I *was* so poor and wretched; O, I *was* so poor and wretched." The Count got terribly angry. He took Mattis by the collar and threw him down the steps, so that he fell and broke both his legs, sprained his hand, and bumped his head, and moreover he injured his inwards. Nobody blamed the Count. He had done what he could for the beggar, and he wanted Menuchah (rest). "So it is," concluded Genendel, "with the Lord and me, Rebbe Leben (dear Rabbi). For years I cried to him every day, and he has had mercy on me; he has not let me starve, though, God knows, there was often not enough from one day to the next. But now he has helped for good. He has done what he could for me, and now he wants to be rid of me, for, God knows, there are enough beggars to bother him. Nay, Rebbe Leben, whenever I feel I want to go to Schul I bethink me of Mattis, and stay at home."

But the parable of Rabbi and Emperor is dangerous teaching if it mean more than this: Man must not importune God. Against this may be set another Rabbinic parable<sup>24</sup>. A man visits his friend and the friend greets him cordially, placing him on the couch beside him. He comes again, and is given a chair; again and receives a stool. He comes a fourth time and the friend says, "The stool is too far off, I cannot fetch it for you." But God is not so; for whenever Israel knocks at the door of God's house the Holy One rejoices, as it is written: For what great nation is there that hath a God so nigh unto them as the Lord our God is, *whenever* we call? The Rabbis, like ourselves, would have been shocked at the supposition that God is at any time inaccessible to the broken-hearted and contrite. "The gate of tears is never shut," said a Rabbi<sup>25</sup>.

Much of what precedes touches only the surface of the subject; we must now try in the few minutes that remain to penetrate a little deeper. The essential relevancy of prayer depends on the nature of God and his relation to man. If God is the absolute, if he is the unchangeable, then prayer must be identical with submission and praise. The worshipper registers his sense of the divine power and as a correlative his own weakness; he adds the corollary that the all-powerful is likewise the all-good. Praise has therefore always formed a large item in the liturgies of the religions which had their source in Judaism. In the Psalter, in the Prayers of Nehemiah and Daniel, on which so many subsequent prayers were modelled, praise is introductory to petition. The oldest of old Psalmic refrains is the *Hōdū*: O give thanks unto the Lord for he is good; for his loving-kindness endureth for ever.

Rabbinic Judaism took a very strong line on this subject<sup>26</sup>. It attributed to Adam the authorship of Ps. xcii: It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord and to sing praises to thy name, O Most High; and it declared that when all sacrifices cease in the Messianic age, for as men

will no longer sin they will offer no more sin-offerings; when all propitiatory and penitential prayers are discontinued, for men will in that period of grace have nothing to repent of or ask pardon for,—when all other sacrifices and prayers cease, the thank-offering and the service of praise will remain eternally. Thus from Adam to the Messiah, in the Rabbinic conception, man's duty and delight is to utter the praises of God. First praise, then supplicate, is the recurrent Rabbinic maxim for writers of prayers. Praise God for sorrow as well as for happiness. What is an affliction of Love, asks the Talmud? It answers, Such affliction as does not deprive the sufferer of the power to pray<sup>27</sup>. So long as prayer is possible, God's hand, though heavy on the unhappy, rests on the unhappy not in anger but in love. The countless benedictions prescribed in the Talmud for every conceivable and inconceivable act of life are all praises. There may have been in this some notion of gratitude for favours to come; but this notion, however degrading as between man and his fellow, is not a low conception as between man and his God—even if, while testifying thanks, the worshipper implies a hope. Or again, there may be in this rubric of praise an element of propitiation—you mollify an irresponsible autocrat by the incense of flattery. But such an idea cannot be said to have consciously invaded the mind of Judaism. The *mind* of Judaism came largely into the domain of prayer, for the study of the Law was not only in itself an act of worship, but the school was often the place of prayer. And the intellect, whether directed to universal history or to personal experience, perceived recurrent ground for praise and thanksgiving. But prayer is not only or chiefly a matter of the mind; it is a matter of the heart.

Now, while the mind appreciates that the only prayer should be praise, the heart is not satisfied by eulogizing God. Through the whole history of human life runs the cry for mercy. As men suffer irrespective of creed, so do



they all appeal to God's mercy; to quote the late S. Singer, "pain is undenominational and so is pity." And here we come face to face with a peculiar Rabbinic dualism—the Mercy and the Justice of God. A few citations will be better than a long exposition of this dualism. The righteous are they that strengthen God; they help him to be merciful. Why are the prayers of the righteous symbolized as a spade? Just as the spade turns the grain from place to place, so the prayers of the righteous turn the divine attributes from the attribute of wrath to the attribute of mercy<sup>28</sup>. And God himself prays to himself in the same strain. At the Creation God made himself a tent in Jerusalem, and therein he prayed. And he said: May it be my will that my children do my will, so that I destroy not my house of prayer. But when Israel's sins made the Holy One destroy the house, then God prayed: May it be my will that my children repent, so that I may rebuild my house. R. Ishmael relates how he once (as a priest) entered the innermost sanctuary to offer incense, and saw there God who asked a blessing, and Rabbi Ishmael said: May it be thy will that thy mercy subdue thy wrath, and God nodded in assent<sup>29</sup>. Weber, with German wrong-headedness, sees in such passages merely the notion of a supreme despot who may or may not permit mercy to temper justice. But though some of these passages are crude, and even childishly naïve, they represent a phase of the attempt to bring God into relation with man, an attempt which is at once the supreme aim and the despair of every religion. And the climax is reached when the Rabbis tell us that God teaches man the very formulæ of prayer; he bids Moses to pray to him, and tells him to say: O God, turn the bitter into sweet<sup>30</sup>. "From thee I fly to thee," wrote Solomon Ibn Gabirol in his *Kether Malchuth*, the most inspired Hebrew hymn after the Psalter.

The just God judges, but his tender mercies are over all his works. It is this belief in the all-pervading mercy

of God that makes Jesus' words, "Thy will, not mine," the supreme utterance of the Jewish consciousness on the subject of prayer. These words express more than resignation: they express also a confidence that God's will is man's ultimate good. Prayer thus becomes something more than petition, something beyond praise; it becomes a harmony between the human and the divine. It is the divine in man going out to meet the divine in God; it is the upward rise of the soul to its heavenly fount. A praying man is in the divine presence<sup>31</sup>. Prayer, in the language of a Jewish mystic, is as flame to coal: it unites the upper and the lower worlds<sup>32</sup>. Prayer, said a Rabbi, is heart-service<sup>33</sup>; it lays the heart of man on the altar of God. No man prays acceptably unless he makes his heart flesh<sup>34</sup>. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart: thus is Israel warned that in the hour of prayer he must not have a divided heart, part for God, and part for worldly aspirations<sup>35</sup>. It is the fear of God that gives virtue to prayer. One self-inflicted heart-pang is more saving than many stripes<sup>36</sup>. Prayer turns aside doom, but it is prayer associated with charity and penitence<sup>37</sup>. Note, in passing, how the old magical force of prayer has been transfigured in such a saying—one of the most popular in the Jewish liturgy. God wants the heart, is another famous utterance. Prayer purifies<sup>38</sup>. God is the Fountain of Israel. As the water cleanses the unclean, so the Holy One cleanses Israel. Which goeth to which? The fountain to the defiled or the defiled to the fountain? The defiled goeth to the fountain, descends, and bathes. Thus is it with prayer. But the fountain is near. If thou canst not go to the house of prayer, pray on thy couch: if thou art unable to frame words, let thy heart meditate in silence<sup>39</sup>. And finally, Rabbi Eliezer said: Thus shall a man pray: "Do thy will, O God, in heaven above, and bestow tranquillity of spirit on those who fear thee below, and what is good in thine own sight do. Blessed art thou, O Lord, thou that hearest prayer<sup>40</sup>."

But there is neither time nor need to add more quotations. In his fine book on *The Psalms in Human Life*, Mr. R. E. Prothero says: "The Psalms, then, are a mirror in which each man sees the motions of his own soul. They express in exquisite words the kinship which every thoughtful human heart craves to find with a supreme, unchanging, loving God, who will be to him a protector, guardian, and friend. They utter the ordinary experiences, the familiar thoughts of men; but they give to these a width of range, an intensity, a depth, and an elevation which transcend the capacity of the most gifted. They translate into speech the spiritual passion of the loftiest genius; they also utter, with the beauty born of truth and simplicity, and with exact agreement between the feeling and the expression, the inarticulate and humble longings of the unlettered peasant. So is it that, in every country, the language of the Psalms has become part of the daily life of nations, passing into their proverbs, mingling with their conversation, and used at every critical stage of existence."

Mr. Prothero traces out, by well-chosen and eloquently described historical instances, how these Psalms, with their deep consciousness of sin, their fine note of humility in the hour of victory, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us," their contrite yet assured aspiration after a renewed communion with God,—how these Psalms have become the breviary and viaticum of humanity. And lo! though the book is entitled "*The Psalms in Human Life*," Mr. Prothero practically ignores their power and influence in Jewish life. All the world is marshalled to testify to the undying value of the Psalms: only the Jews, who wrote the Psalms, are omitted.

It was necessary for me to make this comment, in sadness rather than with indignation. For, too many, in estimating the Jewish conception of prayer, forget that the Psalms were not only Jewish in origin, but the most constantly prized, the most dearly beloved of all the sacred literature of Judaism <sup>41</sup>. Priests and Levites sang psalms

at the daily sacrifices, and when the Temple fell, psalms took the place of sacrifices. The Psalms have been to the Jews a well-spring of consolation, a support in tribulation, a reassurance under sin. And the Jewish theory of prayer is—the Psalter. Rabbinism re-interpreted and re-enforced the Psalter, but abated nothing and surrendered nothing of it. Rabbinism saw in the Psalter, in Heine's words, "sunrise and sunset, birth and death, promise and fulfilment—the whole drama of humanity." And the synagogue absorbed the Psalter into its inmost soul. In the eleventh century, Ibn Gabirol wrote the following Invocation to Prayer, which appears in many modern Jewish liturgies, and is uttered by countless myriads of Jewish worshippers daily in the early morning :

At the dawn I seek thee,  
Refuge, Rock sublime;  
Set my prayer before thee in the morning,  
And my prayer at eventime.  
  
I before thy greatness  
Stand and am afraid:  
All my secret thoughts thine eye beholdeth  
Deep within my bosom laid.  
  
And withal what is it  
Heart and tongue can do?  
What is this my strength, and what is even  
This the spirit in me too?  
  
But indeed man's singing  
May seem good to thee;  
So I praise thee, singing, while there dwelleth  
Yet the breath of God in me.

This rendering is by Mrs. Salaman<sup>42</sup>, and it beautifully and exactly reproduces the Hebrew. "Mechanism," "pharisaism," and all such phrases are intolerably inappropriate when applied to a Rabbinic theory of prayer which finds its frequent expression in such meditations as this.

## NOTES.

<sup>1</sup> For this view of W. Robertson Smith (*Religion of the Semites*, 321, 337), based on Wellhausen (*Reste arabischen Heidenthums*, 126), see Prof. T. K. Cheyne's excellent article on "Prayer" in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. Prof. Cheyne's treatment of the whole subject is as just as it is original.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Dr. Frazer's *Lectures on the Early History of the Kingship*, 1905, pp. 38, 52, &c.

<sup>3</sup> Bousset's *Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* is in many respects thoroughly unacceptable; but the author's remarks on prayer (p. 157) are not lacking in truth and insight. They form in essence a severe criticism of Schürer, for Bousset perceives that the Pharisaic organization of prayer did deepen the spiritual life of the masses.

<sup>4</sup> Mishnah, *Berachoth*, V end (Talmud B. *Berachoth*, 34 b). The passage concerning Ḥanina b. Dosa cited later on occurs at this same reference.

<sup>5</sup> London, Isbister, 1904.

<sup>6</sup> Mishnah, *Taanith*, III, 8. Cf. note 16 below. Onias and Ḥanina are both held to have been Essenes. Prayer for rain must only be uttered near the rain-season (*ibid.*, I, 2). Does this imply a belief in the order of nature? Such prayer had to be sincere; on Tabernacles men did not pray for rain till the end of the festival, when the duty of dwelling in the tabernacle was over, so that "men might pray for rain with a perfect heart."

<sup>7</sup> Sirach (Hebrew) vii. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Buber's *Tanchuma*, Genesis, p. 134 (Toledoth, § 14).

<sup>9</sup> T. B. *Berachoth*, 10 a (foot).

<sup>10</sup> Mishnah, *Berachoth*, IX; T. B. *Berachoth*, 60 a, has many sayings on חפלה שוה.

<sup>11</sup> T. B. *Moed Katon*, 18 b.

<sup>12</sup> See on חפלה שוה, T. B. *Berachoth*, 32 b, 55 a; *Baba Bathra*, 164 b. He who prays thinking he deserves answer receives none. *Rosh Hashanah*, 18 a. On the other hand: "Whoever performs the will of heaven and directs his heart devoutly to his prayer receives an answer." *Exod. Rabba*, § 21; cf. *Berachoth*, 6 b (foot). The distinction may be said to be in this. Devout prayer is answered, but the expectation of an answer is not to enter into the thought of the utterer of the prayer. And the failure of an answer must not disconcert the worshipper. As he does not start relying on an answer, he is not overwhelmed by receiving none. "What is good in thine own sight do" (see note 40 below). This was the final attitude. Of course God does what he thinks good; prayer makes man perceive that what God thinks good is good.

<sup>13</sup> *Exodus Rabba*, ch. xxi.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. xxiii. *Tanchuma*, § מן (near end).

<sup>15</sup> T. B. *Yebamoth*, 64 a. On public worship see *Berachoth*, 8 a. Prayer for the wicked (that they may repent and be saved) is enjoined. T. B. *Berachoth*, 10 a. For the passage about the Egyptians see T. B. *Megillah*, 10 b; *Sota*, 36 a.

<sup>16</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, xiv. 2. § 1. Schürer's treatment of the episode (I, 293, 294) is worth noting. He includes it as one of the "Episodes highly characteristic of the contemporary Jewish pietism (*Frömmigkeit*).<sup>17</sup> His final comment is: "But the people was so little in sympathy with this brotherly spirit of Onias that they at once stoned him." But Josephus says that the stoning was done by οἱ πονηροὶ τῶν Ἰουδαίων, "the wicked of the Jews," and has pointedly stated previously that the noblest of the Jews had left the country for Egypt (οἱ δοκιμάτατοι τῶν Ἰουδαίων ἐκλιπόντες τὴν χώραν εἰς Αἴγυπτον ἔφυγον). This Onias becomes a popular hero in the later Jewish tradition, and it was "highly characteristic" of the Jewish *Frömmigkeit* that it held precisely the brotherly view of Onias in the positive as his was in the negative form. "A human being cannot hear two people appealing to him at once; but the Holy One, even though *all creatures on earth* come and cry before him, hears their cries, as it is written, O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come" (*Mechilta*, Shira, § 8; ed. Friedmann, 41 b).

<sup>17</sup> *Exodus Rabba*, xxi.; *Echa Rabba*, s.v. גור ברעי.

<sup>18</sup> *Baba Kama*, 92 a; *Baba Bathra*, 90 a-91 b; *Berachoth*, 10 b.

<sup>19</sup> T. Jer. Yoma, v. Hal. 2. (Cf. Buber, *Tanchuma*, Lev, p. 4 for parallels.)

<sup>20</sup> *Mishnah*, *Aboth*, i. 15. In the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, X. p. 166 b, Dr. J. D. Eisenstein writes: "The higher class, that is the scholars, would not be disturbed in their studies, which they considered of superior importance to prayers. R. Judah recited his prayers only once in thirty days (*Rosh Hashanah*, 35 a). R. Jeremiah, studying under R. Ze'era, was anxious to leave his study when the time for prayer arrived; and Ze'era quoted: He that turneth away his ear from hearing the Law, even his prayer shall be abomination (Prov. xxviii. 9; T. B. *Sabbath*, 10 a)." The reference here is to the set times and forms of prayer. Individuals prayed spontaneously at all times. R. Akiba, we are expressly told, prayed briefly in public, but lengthily in private.

<sup>21</sup> *Aboth*, II, 13; *Berachoth*, IV, 4 (cf. Talmud, *Berachoth*, 28 b). "At first," writes Prof. L. Blau, "there were no written prayers; a scribe of the end of the first century says: The writers of benedictions are as those that burn the Torah. A man who was caught copying some at Sidon threw a bundle of his copies into a wash-tub (*Sabbath*, 115 b). In no case was written matter used during public worship. Prayer-books appear about the seventh century" (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, art. Liturgy, Vol. VIII, p. 138 b).

<sup>22</sup> T. B. *Berachoth*, 24 b, 29 a. For the next citation see *Yebamoth*, 105 b.

<sup>23</sup> *Tanchuma*, ברכה. The passage, taken from Miss Wolfenstein's story, is quoted from *A Renegade and other Tales* (Philadelphia: the Jewish Publication Society of America, 1905; p. 200). R. Jochanan thought that men might pray all day, but others limited the lawful times of prayer to three (*Berachoth*, 21 a, 31 a).

<sup>24</sup> Midrash on Ps. iv.

<sup>25</sup> T. B. *Berachoth*, 32 b.

<sup>26</sup> *Leviticus Rabba*, § 9; *T. B. Berachoth*, 6 and 31 b, and 32 a.

<sup>27</sup> *T. B. Berachoth*, 5 a.

<sup>28</sup> *Tanchuma*, כִּתּוּב (end); *T. B. Succah*, 14 a.

<sup>29</sup> Midrash, *Yalkut*, on Ps. lxxvi. 3; *T. B. Berachoth*, 7 a.

<sup>30</sup> *Exodus Rabba*, § 43.

<sup>31</sup> *T. B. Sanhedrin*, 22 a; *Yoma*, 53 b.

<sup>32</sup> *Zohar* ויקהל, 213 b. See *Jewish Encyclopedia* (J. W. Eisenstein), Vol. X, p. 169 b, for further citations.

<sup>33</sup> *Sifri*, ed. Friedmann, p. D (on Deut. xi. 13); *T. B. Taanith*, 2 a.

<sup>34</sup> *T. B. Sota*, 5 a.

<sup>35</sup> *Tanchuma*, on Deut. vi. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *T. B. Berachoth*, 7 a.

<sup>37</sup> *Jer. Sanhedrin*, X, 28 c; *Numbers Rabba*, § 12.

<sup>38</sup> *Exodus Rabba*, xxii; *Mechilta* (בְּשִׁירָה), § 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Yalkut*, on Ps. iv.

<sup>40</sup> *T. B. Berachoth*, 29 b (towards end).

<sup>41</sup> An inspiring and pathetic chapter could be written on the use of the Psalms in Jewish life. *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book*, ed. S. Singer, contains about half the Psalter. The whole of the Psalms are read in daily instalments in many synagogues. But besides this liturgical use, there are many historical records of the application of the Psalms in times of stress under danger and martyrdom, of gratitude under salvation, of acceptance of God's will and inspiration to courageous endeavour—which prove the fertile influence of the Psalter on Jewish life in all ages. Here is one famous instance. In the tenth century, the captain of a corsair vessel had captured Moses b. Hanoeh and his fair wife. The pirate became enamoured of his beautiful captive. One day she asked her husband in Hebrew if those drowned in the sea rose again at the Resurrection. He answered her with the Psalmic text: "The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring again from the depths of the sea" (Ps. lxviii. 22). Fortified with this hope, and resolved to save her honour, she threw herself in the sea.

<sup>42</sup> In *Songs of Exile* (Macmillan) and *Service of the Synagogue* (Routledge). In Hebrew the prayer is included in Baer's classical edition of the daily Liturgy, and in many other editions.

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